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ABSTRACT

Videos are a powerful tool in helping English language learners improve their language skills. They provide the learner with content, context, and language, and will play an increasing role in both classroom English-as-a-Second-Language instruction and self-study. Regardless of the quality and sophistication of videos, whether they are in use in a classroom, in distance learning, or in a combination, the teacher's guidance is crucial in facilitating use of this medium to improve adult English language learners' communication skills and knowledge of United States culture. Selection of videos should be based on their capacity for inspiration/motivation/interest, content, clarity of message, pacing, graphics, length of sequence(s), independence of sequence(s), availability and quality of related materials, and potential classroom use. Some videos, video series, and multimedia materials currently in use for ESL instruction are cited. Contains 19 references. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (MSE)

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Using Videos with Adult English Language Learners

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Video can be used in a variety of instructional settings—in classrooms, in distance-learning sites where information is broadcast from a central point to learners who interact with a facilitator via video or computer, and in self-study situations. It can be used in teachers' professional development (see, for example, Savage & Howard, 1992) or with students as ways of presenting content, starting conversations, and providing illustration for concepts. Teachers or students can create their own videotapes as content for the class or as a means to assess learner performance (Taggart, 1996).

This digest focuses on using video with adults learning English as a second language (ESL). It provides a rationale for using video with these learners, presents guidelines for selecting and using videos in instruction, discusses some commercial videos used in adult ESL programs, and concludes with a discussion of the future of video use in instruction.

Advantages

There are a number of good reasons to use video in adult classrooms. Video combines visual and audio stimuli, is accessible to those who have not yet learned to read and write well, and provides context for learning (Fazey, 1999; Johnston, 1999). For English language learners, video has the added benefit of providing real language and cultural information (Bello, 1999; Stempleski, 1992). Video can be controlled (stopped, paused, repeated), and it can be presented to a group of students, to individuals, or for self study. It allows learners to see facial expressions and body language at the same time as they hear the stress, intonation, and rhythm of the language (Bello, 1999).

Videos can be stimulating to adult learners. Many videos are based on stories, which are enjoyed by almost everyone and particularly favored in some cultures (Johnston, 1999). Videos that use the conventions of entertainment television (plot, character, development, and resolution) may catch the attention of learners who do not yet read.

Authentic Videos

Because many excellent videos are produced as entertainment for native English speakers, they generally present real language that is not simplified and is spoken at a normal speed with genuine accents. These videos include movies, television programs, and news broadcasts; they can provide a realistic view of American culture, and their compelling story lines can motivate learners to stretch their comprehension. Additionally, using authentic videos in the classroom can provide opportunities for learners to evaluate a medium that they use in their daily life (Stempleski, 1992). This is important because, just as learners need to develop critical literacy skills in order to analyze what they read to distinguish fact from fiction or to identify an author's position on a topic and compare it to their own (Florez, 1998), they also need to be able to do this with what they see and hear, i.e., with films and television programs.

Instructional Videos

Instructional videos for English language development have been created for use in classrooms or in other educational settings and have additional advantages. They are likely to already have been evaluated for language, content, and length, and many instructional videos are packaged as multimedia resources that include student workbooks, teacher guides, video transcripts, and audiotapes (Stempleski, 1992).

Challenges

The use of authentic videos is challenging. Often they do not provide the best means of explaining complex concepts or practicing particular grammar or writing skills (Johnston, 1999).

It takes time for the teacher to preview and select authentic videos and then to prepare activities for learners. As the language use and the context of authentic videos are not controlled, teachers will need to take time to explain these.

Copyright presents another challenge. Regulations governing the use of broadcast programs off-air concern how long the recording can be kept and how often it can be shown. Details can be obtained from *Circular 21: Reproductions of Copyrighted Works by Educators and Librarians* (Library of Congress, 1995).

Authentic videos may contain language, content, or themes that are controversial, or even inappropriate in the adult ESL classroom. It takes time, thought, and careful planning on the part of the teacher to prepare learners to watch and discuss these videos. On the other hand, selecting only G-rated films or family programs may not be advisable, as their content and language may be of little interest and relevance to adult learners. Furthermore, if an authentic video meets instructional objectives and is motivating to the learners, it may serve as a springboard for discussing differing cultural norms as well as the issue of censorship. These discussions can serve to enhance learners' critical thinking skills while increasing their acquisition of language and cultural information (Gareis, 1997).

Selecting Videos

Whether using authentic or instructional videos, there are criteria to be followed in their selection. Arcario (1992), Johnston (1999), and Stempleski (1992) suggest that teachers ask themselves the following questions before choosing a video or video series:

- **Inspiration/Motivation/Interest:** Will the video appeal to my students? Will it make them want to learn? For example, a scene

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from *Joy Luck Club*, a movie about conflicts between first- and second-generation Chinese American women, may be of limited interest to a class of construction workers from El Salvador.

- **Content:** Does the content match my instructional goals? Is it culturally appropriate for my learners? On the other hand, *My Family/Mi Familia*, a film about an Hispanic family in East Los Angeles, may be of great interest to the class of construction workers as they live and raise families in the United States.
- **Clarity of message:** Is the instructional message clear to my students? Here the teacher is vital. Preparing the learners to understand what they are going to watch makes the difference between time wasted and time well spent.
- **Pacing:** Is the rate of the language or instruction too fast for my students? Many authentic videos move at a pace difficult for a nonnative speaker to follow. Even an instructional video may be too fast paced and dense for adults new to English.
- **Graphics:** What graphics are used to explain a concept? Do they clarify it? Do they appear on screen long enough to be understood by the learner? In some instructional videos, graphics, charts, and even language patterns may be on the screen too briefly to be fully comprehended.
- **Length of sequence:** Is the sequence to be shown short enough? With second language learners, segments that are less than five minutes are often sufficient. A two- to three-minute segment can easily furnish enough material for a one-hour lesson (Stempleski, 1992).
- **Independence of sequence:** Can this segment be understood without lengthy explanations of the plot, setting, and character motivation preceding and following it? Teachers need to decide whether it's worth investing the time and effort to prepare learners to understand the context of certain language and cultural nuances, or distinctions. For example, the context of a vignette from a television situation comedy such as *Friends*, which explores the relationships among six white twenty-something New Yorkers, is much more complex than a scene from a film such as *Mississippi Masala*, which explores an interracial relationship.
- **Availability and quality of related materials:** What print materials accompany the video? With videos designed to be used for English language instruction, the accompanying textbooks, resource books, and workbooks need to be examined carefully to see if they meet the instructional needs of the learners. With authentic videos, transcripts may be available. If a movie has been adapted from a short story or novel, the text can be read before or after viewing the video.
- **Use of videos:** How will I use the video? In the classroom, a teacher can help students tackle video presentations that are linguistically more complex and in which the story line and characters are more ambiguous. Videos of this type should probably be avoided when assigned for self study (Thomas, et al., 1992).

Using Videos

Milli Fazey of Kentucky Educational Television (KET) (1999) suggests that teachers think of using a video as a three-part lesson, including pre-viewing, viewing, and post-viewing activities.

Before presenting the video, the teacher must engage the learners' interest in what they will be doing and prepare them to do it successfully. The teacher tells the students or leads them to discover for themselves why they are viewing the video (e.g., to understand work expectations in the United States, to learn ways of meeting and greeting people, to learn ways that parents can help their children at school). Preparation may include a pre-viewing reading activity or a discussion of new vocabulary from the video. It may involve looking at still pictures from the video and predicting language and content to be covered. Finally, pre-viewing preparation means ensuring that an operating VCR and monitor is available and that the screen is large enough for all students to easily view the film. Fazey recommends using a 20-inch screen for a class of 12 to 15 learners.

While learners view the video, the teacher should remain in the classroom with the learners to observe their reactions and see what they do not understand, what they are intrigued by, and what bothers them. The teacher is there also to press the pause, rewind, and play buttons as needed. Sometimes it is best to leave the lights on. This facilitates the teacher's observations and enables learners to take notes and to complete worksheets prepared by the teacher. For example, in viewing a vignette from *Joy Luck Club*, learners may be directed to note down the words that the young European-American man uses to compliment the dinner prepared by his Chinese-American girlfriend's mother.

After the viewing, the teacher should review and clarify complex points, encourage discussion, and explain and assign follow-up activities whether they are included in the student texts and materials that accompany the instructional videos or they are developed for authentic videos. For example, the workbook for the instructional video *A Day in the Life of the González Family* (Delta Systems Co., Inc., 1998) includes post-viewing activities that direct learners to discuss in small groups the language and cultural concepts presented in the video, work on grammar or vocabulary activities taken from the language and structures used in the video, and then do a consensus-building and problem-solving activity and complete a project that takes them to the larger community. Similarly, after watching an authentic video such as *El Norte*—a film that chronicles the odyssey of two Central Americans who flee persecution in their native Guatemala to immigrate to the United States—learners might develop projects where they interview recent immigrants in their neighborhoods and report on their experiences coming to the United States.

Some Videos Currently in Use

Recently, several videos for adult English language learners have been produced for broadcast on public television stations and as videotapes to purchase. They are published in multimedia packages that include teacher texts, student books, audiotapes, and, in some cases, reading texts, reproducible masters for the classroom, and assessment materials.

These videos may be used in library programs, community-based programs, or workplace programs where learners meet with an instructor weekly or monthly, but most of the learning is through self study (*@Work*, 1999). The following videos are marketed for use with adult English language learners in classroom, distance learning, or self-study settings.

Crossroads Café

This series was funded by the U.S. Department of Education and several states, and broadcast on public TV in 1997 and 1998. It tells the story of an ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse group of individuals who work at and patronize a café. They face challenges common to many immigrants (and to some non-immigrants as well). Two instructional segments are included in each episode; one is on culture, the other on language patterns.

The multimedia package that accompanies the videos includes workbooks and photostories for learners and transcripts and resource books for teachers. Assessment packages containing video and audiotapes and blackline masters can be used to measure student progress in reading, writing, listening, speaking, language structures, and critical thinking. In addition, there is a partner guide with activities for native speaker friends, relatives, or tutors to use in working with the English language learners outside the classroom.

The video series can be purchased from INTELECOM at http://www.Intelecom.org/cafe/html/ or 626-796-7300, or by e-mail at customerservice@intelecom.org/. The print materials are distributed by Heinle & Heinle at 800-760-7400 or at www.heinle.com. For more information on this series, see the evaluation of the implementation of the *Crossroads Café* in the state of Florida (McLean, 1997).

On Common Ground

This series on U.S. history and government was produced by INTELECOM with funding from the Immigration and Naturalization Service and was broadcast on public television in winter/spring of 1999. Like *Crossroads Café*, it uses a story line. Segments on such issues as freedom of speech, due process of law, economic rights, diversity, civil liberties, and equal rights show learners how to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

The video and accompanying student text can be purchased from INTELECOM at http://www.Intelecom.org/oncommon.html/ or 626-796-7300, or by e-mail at customerservice@intelecom.org/. More information on the package can be found on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) at http://www.pbs.org/adultlearning/als/.

TV 411

The Adult Literacy Media Alliance (ALMA) has produced a series of 26 videos for native English speakers that is adaptable for English language learners. The videos are centered on the themes of parenting, health, and personal finance, and each episode includes celebrities, personal stories, and recurring characters as well as segments on word play and math. For example, in *Laverne*, actress Liz Torres plays a store clerk who helps a customer calculate how many diapers to buy his triplets for one week. The fast pace and combination of animation and live action keep the interest level high for viewers of this series. (It has been broadcast on both PBS and cable TV.) This also means, though, that the English language learner must have excellent listening skills and advanced level vocabulary. The student texts that accompany the videos are in magazine format.

More information is available at http://www.edc.org/ALMA/ or by e-mail from alma@edc.org/.

Connect with English

This video series uses a soap opera approach to language learning, as it follows a year or so in the life of a young woman from Boston who leaves her home to pursue her dream of a musical career in San Francisco. *Connect with English* consists of 25 videos, each containing two 15-minute episodes and a segment where English language learners express their views on the characters' actions and on the cultural concepts explored in the videos. The series includes study guides for classroom work, home-viewing guides if the series is used for distance learning (without the support of a class), and reading texts. It was produced and is telecast by WGBH-Boston. Unlike *Crossroads Café*, most of the characters in *Connect with English* are young, native speakers. The staging and filming of this series give it authenticity; it almost appears to be a broadcast TV drama. Because of this, and because the level of English needed to comprehend this video is higher than for *Crossroads Café*, *Connect with English* is appropriate for secondary school students and students in intensive English language programs, as well as for adult learners.

More information is available at http://www.pbs.org/als/guide/.

Other Instructional Videos

A video series for self study is *Inglés sin Barreras* (Lexicon, 1998), which contains student manuals, student texts, transcripts, and audiotapes to be used with the 15-minute lessons on the video. In this series, instructors present actual lessons to a studio class. The language and structures are chosen to reach adult (Spanish-speaking) learners at beginning English levels.

A Day in the Life of the González Family is an instructional video with student text and teacher's guide (Delta Systems Co., Inc., 1998) that must be used in the classroom. The video is a spark for adult English language learners to develop communication skills while acquiring cultural content knowledge relevant to their daily lives. The majority of the content and language is in the accompanying print materials. The textbook consists of 10 thematic units that lead learners from guided language practice through project-based activities. These activities support development in vocabulary, grammar, literacy, and problem solving.

English for New Americans (Random House, 1999) is a three-video series designed for use in the classroom as well as for self study. It includes videotapes, audiotapes, and student workbooks for beginning and intermediate level adult learners. Each video contains seven short lessons on such topics as enrolling children in school or applying for a job. The video's four recurring characters are a Chinese woman, a Russian man, and a Mexican husband and wife. An unusual feature of this series are the unscripted clips of native and nonnative English speakers responding to questions on the lessons' topics from their own experiences. Transcripts of the video are available.

Future Directions

Educators of English language learners are exploring the use of video on the World Wide Web (Silc, 1998) and the use of software applications that include video on CD ROMs (Gaer, 1998). Although not widely employed, the technology does exist to combine the two—to use video clips in interactive websites (Davis, 1999). The capability also exists for teachers to create interactive websites for their students and for students anywhere in the world to practice and assess their English language development while acquiring cultural information about the United States.

Conclusion

Videos are a powerful tool in helping English language learners improve their language skills. They provide the learner with content, context, and language. Videos will play an increased role in providing ESL instruction to students in the classroom as well as in self-study situations. However, regardless of the quality and sophistication of videos, when they are used in a classroom, in distance learning, or in combination of the two settings, the teacher's guidance is key in facilitating this medium to improve adult English language learners' communication skills and knowledge of U.S. culture.

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